DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 125 RC 020 787

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TITLE The Impact of Employment on Rural High School Students.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 7p.; Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Rural Education Association Research Forum (San Antonio, TX, October 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Employment Patterns; High Schools; *High School Students; Rural Schools; *Rural Youth; *Student Attitudes; *Student Employment; Student Surveys

ABSTRACT

A survey of 229 students in grades 10-12 at a rural consolidated high school in Tennessee sought to determine employment patterns among rural students and the impact of that employment on students' academic and personal lives. Findings indicate that employment of rural youth was an accepted part of the teen culture; student employment increased at higher grade levels, with the greatest frequency during the senior year. Over half of seniors were employed. Males and females were equally likely to be employed. Working students were more likely to be tardy or absent and to be making poorer grades. Failing grades in English were reported by six percent of working students and one percent of nonworking students. Working students were less likely to be planning to attend a 4-year college and more likely to be planning to join the military or to attend a technical school or community college. Over half of employed students worked more than 20 hours per week. They were more likely to use their money for personal expenses (car and entertainment) than for family needs or college savings. According to students, the greatest negative impact of work was lack of leisure time to spend with friends and family or to be involved with sports and clubs. The greatest positive impact was money to spend. Contains 12 references. (TD)

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THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYMENT ON RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Paper Presented to the
National Rural Education Association
Research Forum
1996 Annual Meeting
San Antonio Texas
by

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THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYMENT ON RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The nature of youth in American society has undergone dramatic changes over the past half century. In increasing numbers, school-age youth have entered the work place, holding part-time jobs after school and on weekends. The reasons that American teenagers have flocked to the workplace are embedded in events that have taken place in the school, the family, the economy, and the larger society. (Steinberg & Greenberger, 1986). As the social ecology of youth has changed, the work place has assumed a significant role in the life of many teens. Teen employment impacts their personal lives, the lives of their families, and their schools. (National Commission on Youth, 1980)

Baxter (1992) reported that two-thirds of seniors work fifteen or more hours per week and that eighty percent of all students will work sometime during their high school career. Lewin-Epstein (1981) found that teen employment increases as family income increases up to a range indicative of lower middle-class status.

Previous studies in more urban settings have found that working teens experience fatigue, falling grades, and diminished interest in schooling (Workman, 1990; MacArthur, 1989); take easier electives and fewer advanced courses(McNeil, 1984); watched less television (Barton, 1989); and were more likely to smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, and ultimately drop out of school (Kablaoui and Pautler, 1991).

More positively, teachers have observed that employed students have increased practical business knowledge and social

skills through the work experience (Kablaoui and Pautler, 1991). Scholars have argued that work place involvement facilitates the transition from adolescence to adulthood through transmission of knowledge, practical skills, adult perspectives, and greater sense of responsibility which could lead to better school performance (Marsh, 1989).

The role of youth employment in breaking the poverty barriers in urban communities has been debated. (National Committee on Economic Development, 1987; Rosenburg, 1986). Little attention has been directed toward the impact of employment on rural youth.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine the employment patterns among rural students and the impact of that employment on the academic and personal lives of the students.

Methodology

Using the review of literature as a basis, a survey instrument was developed in cooperation with the guidance personnel at a rural consolidated high school in Tennessee. The survey was administered by teachers and guidance personnel in intact classroom settings during the winter of 1996. Usable surveys were returned for 229 students in grades 10 through 12. Slightly more than half of the students were employed. Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and chi-square comparisons of working and non-working students.

Findings

Of the students surveyed, 51.97% were working. Among

working students, 51.64 were female, 48.36 were male. Employment increased from 14.75% of sophomores to 19.51% of juniors to 55.74% of seniors.

Working teens were significantly more likely to be absent from school. Of the teens surveyed, 12.15% of non-working teens and 20.49% of working teens had missed four or more days of school. While non-working teens were more likely to have been tardy one or two days, working teens were more likely to have been tardy three or more days (37.70% vs 18.70%).

English grades were used as the measure of academic performance. Non-working teens were more likely to have an A in English during the last reporting period (25.71% vs 8.26%). The modal English grade for non-working students was a B (45.71%) while non-working students earned a C (41.28%). Failing grades were reported by 0.95% of non-working teens and 6.42% of working teens.

On a future plans continuum 74.77% of non-working students indicated plans to attend a four year college compared to 38.34% of working students. Working students were more likely to be planning to join the military (4.10% vs 1.87%), or attend a technical center or community college (26.23% vs 8.51%). Approximately 10% of each group planned to enter the job market. Several students marked "Other" (12.30% working vs 4.67% non-working) and indicated that they planned to marry or "sponge off" of their parents.

Employment patterns included fast food/restaurant (31.15%), retail/grocery/department store (21.31%), mechanical/garage/gas

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station (16.39%), agriculture (15.57%), child care (5.74%), and clerical (4.10%). Students reported that 63.11% earned above the minimum wage while only 5.74% earned below minimum wage. The number of hours per week worked were 0-10 hours (12.30%), 11-20 hours (31.15%), 21-30 hours (36.07%), and 30+ hours (20.49%).

Working students averaged 5-7 hours of sleep per night , but 11.48% reported less than 5 hours of sleep per night. Student identified disadvantages of working included loss of leisure time (67.21%), exclusion from sports and clubs (18.85%), inadequate sleep (13.93%), inadequate homework time (8.20%), dislike of the job (7.38%), lower grades (6.56%), and school attendance problems (4.10%).

Students most frequently used their wages for entertainment (66.39%), car expenses (62.30%), clothes (53.28%), family living expenses (17.21%), school expenses (17.21%), college savings (14.75%). However, the greatest amount of earnings went to car expenses while the smallest amount went to college savings.

Conclusions

Employment of rural youth was an accepted part of the teen culture at the high school surveyed. Student employment increased dramatically each year with the greatest frequency during the senior year. Males and females were equally likely to be employed.

Working students were more likely to be tardy, absent, and to be making poorer grades. They were less likely to be planning to attend a four-year college. They were more likely to use their money for personal (car and entertainment) expenses than

for family needs or college savings. According to the students, the greatest negative impact of work was lack of leisure time to spend with friends and family or to be involved with sports and clubs. The greatest positive impact was money to spend.

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